
RUSSIA'S INTERFERENCE IN KOSOVO HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR CANADA, PRESIDENT SAYS

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Kosovos president says Russia is trying to destabilize his country and its Balkan neighbours through fake news and other disruptions.

Hashim Thaci made those charges Tuesday during a visit to Ottawa and said this makes Canada a target, too, because Russia is trying to undermine the values and institutions that Kosovo shares with its Western allies.

By attacking those principles and values, they are attacking Canada as well, Thaci told The Canadian Press after testifying before the House of Commons foreign affairs committee.

Thaci praised Canadas support of his country, which was carved out of the former Yugoslavia in the decade following the 1999 NATO bombardment of the then-Serbian province of Kosovo.

Canadian warplanes took part in NATOs 78-day air campaign to stop a bloody Serbian crackdown against ethnic Albanian separatists. Serbias then-president Slobodan Milosevic was later indicted for war crimes.

Canada was among the first countries to recognize Kosovos independence in 2008, but Thaci says Russia regularly blocks its efforts to be recognized by the United Nations and to join the NATO alliance and the European Union.

Thaci warned that delays in allowing Kosovo to join these Western alliances make his country more vulnerable to Russian interference.

NATO and the EU should not be late with enlargement and integration of the Western Balkans,

Thaci said through a translator.

He said Russias interference in Kosovo includes the spread of fake news stories designed to depict the country as a failed state.

Russia has sowed discord throughout the Balkans, said Thaci.

Montenegro suffered the worst, he said, blaming Russia for attempting to orchestrate a coup last year to prevent the country from joining NATO.

Russia has denied all accusations that it was behind such a plot, but a criminal trial of 14 accused coup plotters now underway in Montenegro is casting an unfavourable spotlight on the Kremlin.

A key witness testified last month that a Russian operative paid him to organize 500 people to trigger disturbances last year in the capital of Podgorica on the day the country voted in parliamentary elections.

In June, Montenegro became the 29th country to join NATO. That came in the face of strong opposition from Moscow, which has vigorously opposed the expansion of the military alliance to which Canada also belongs.

Russia views NATO expansion of eastern Europe as a threat to its regional security and interference in what it sees as its traditional sphere of influence.

Russias relations with Canada are currently at low ebb because of Parliaments recent passage of a new anti-corruption law named in honour of Russian whistleblower Sergei Magnitsky.

Russia said Canada would cause irreparable harm to relations by passing this Magnitsky law, which targets the actions of gross human rights violators in all countries.

In the interview, Thaci said Canada needs to be vigilant against potential threats from Russia.

We always have to be cautious and careful these days. If somebody thinks they will stop this, theyre wrong. They will continue attacking, fighting Western values.

Thaci had a brief meeting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday and is to meet Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland on Wednesday.

Kaynak/Source: